

Transcript

Derek Bruff: [0:00] This is leading lines. I'm Derek Bruff. Way back in 2007 On the very first episode of the Vanderbilt Center for teachings original podcast. Before leading lines was a gleam in our eyes. I interviewed Vanderbilt history professor Michael Bess about teaching with Wikipedia. Back in those days, Wikipedia didn't have a good reputation and academia. After all, if anyone could edit this online encyclopedia, how could it ever be a trustworthy source? Michael, however, had a different take. He asked his students to read through the discussion pages for contentious Wikipedia articles, like the one on the atomic bombings of Japan during World War II. The arguments that Wikipedia contributors had on those pages about how to shape those Wikipedia entries. According to Michael, they reflected the same kinds of arguments that historians made about those same topics. Michael wanted to give his history majors insight into how historians think. And he used Wikipedia because it was more accessible and understandable to a student's. Then wading through a pile of journal articles. The conversation about Wikipedia in academia has come a long way since 2007. Brooke Ackerly and Kristin Michelitch, both political science

professors here at Vanderbilt University, currently editing a forthcoming special issue of the journal PS Political science and politics. The special issue is focused on Wikipedia, the systematic knowledge gaps and biases that Wikipedia has and efforts by university faculty to address those issues through student initiatives. In the issue they reflect on their own experiences engaging their students as Wikipedia contributors with benefits both to Wikipedia and their students. In September 2021, I invited Brooke and Kristen to talk about those experiences at a special spotlight event at the Vanderbilt Digital Commons. A new project I'm heading up here at Vanderbilt. More on that later. On today's episode of leading lines, we share some of the audio from that spotlight event. Will hear first from Brooke accurately, professor of political science, about the politics of knowledge, the way that those politics intersect with Wikipedia, and the kinds of learning outcomes her class Wikipedia projects lead to. Then we'll hear from Kristen Michelitch, assistant professor of political science, about the learning outcomes she's seen with her students, as well as the practical approaches and tools she uses with her Wikipedia assignments. The two of them make a compelling case for teaching with Wikipedia. And whether or not you've tried your hand at a Wikipedia assignment. I think you'll hear some valuable insights in their presentation.

Brooke Ackerly: [2:57] I really enjoy teaching with Wikipedia. I'm working in partnership with activists who use Wikipedia. So, what I'm going to share with you are the background

conditions that make it a sign of activism and make it a site of experiential learning for our students. So, what's up with Wikipedia? Well, it's got over 55 million articles. It was launched on January 15th, 2001. So, it began about the beginning of my academic career. And when it began, because it was this, a democratization of knowledge premise was supposed to be an encyclopedia that was crowd-sourced. Most of us in academe didn't find much useful in it. And in fact, we spent it to the extent that we taught with it versus micro bested. That is to say careful handled with care. And what I'm going to talk about today is why we continue to need to handle with care. But why me know, when you handle with care is not obvious to you that you need to do so. That is Wikipedia's principles and practices. Given it a veneer, thoroughness, who weakness of neutrality. And for those of us in disciplines where we occasionally ask, where does knowledge come from? What are the politics of knowledge creation documentation? Wikipedia is a very important site for us to be asking this question. But if we're at an institution like Vanderbilt or really many, maybe all in the global north. Who we don't maybe, or internet goes out for an hour or we have a bad connection shutdown video so that we can continue our conversation. That may be the extent of our Internet limitations when it comes to accessing knowledge. But around the world there are other limitations. And what I use Wikipedia for is to provide, first and foremost, is to provide students with an experience on their own privilege. So often, our privileged within the politics of knowledge is not particularly transparent to us. And I use Wikipedia in my

classroom cluster range of classes to reveal to students just how privileged their understanding of. I'm neutrality is me get into the nuts and bolts, so that makes sense. Okay, So I think I might read one sentence from the coauthored introduction to that collection and Derek mentioned is coming out. Wikipedia's aim is to democratize access to knowledge by taking knowledge resources from often gated scholarly publications and synthesized them in writing accessible to lay people. To generate articles. Wikipedia relies on crowdsourcing through volunteer editorship. All authors are editors. Okay? So what I want to share with you today is my concern about some of the problems with the crowd, some of the problems of the neutrality of sourcing and consequently some of the problems of the democratization of knowledge and what we do about that. So if the idea is for Wikipedia to be accurate, complete, and unbiased, then we have to have some rules about how you take data from. What are librarians make accessible to us. Also perfectly fine to access newspapers and other things that are available on internet. So we need some rules about what content that's available comes to be cited on Wikipedia. This is going to talk a bit more about using the tool of developing the neutral voice as a piece, piece of her pedagogy. For me, it's more about noticing that that landscape of knowledge itself is pretty bias. Most of the languages of the world are not available in written texts that are easily accessed by even the most privileged in the global north. So already we're not, if you look at the data set of books available by Google books, even Google Books analysis of how

much increase knowledge it's making available to the world is an incredibly clean piece. Secondly, you don't just get the site whenever you want. You can cite primary sources, canceling interviews. So academics ourselves are not particularly good offers on Wikipedia of our own area of expertise, because our knowledge often comes from our firsthand research. So what we do when we teach how to use Wikipedia is what we need to do to teach ourselves, which is an axis. That secondary literature make that literature accessible. So as an epidemic in an area, wow, some of the nooks and crannies of the field. And I can help my students find that and then they can draw on that data. But I am also often quite similar to my understanding of things by myself, primary source research and what is not allowed to be used. Okay, so that's first, that's what they are. Because there are systematic biases in the data that are available in the world. They're going to be systematic biases that we need to overcome if we want Wikipedia truly to be a democratized space, not so. Secondly, there are a range of ways that the rules of Wikipedia can make it hard for us to break through that politics of knowledge. I'm going to just talk about three ways that we can use Wikipedia to reveal that politics of knowledge to our students and that, you know what? Kristen, who can talk a little bit more about the nuts and bolts of how we can do that in the classroom. So first, the policies of notability, neutrality and reliable sources, which establishes what can be included and how and which references might support each substantive claim that a Wikipedia article wants to make those rules or Wikipedia or couches

if they're neutral words, but they're not in fact neutral words. That is, sometimes critics saying that your voice is not spoken in a neutral voice is silencing a political criticism. So it is particularly challenging for activists from marginalized spaces don't have there, have a great sentence has been documented in secondary sources. They are not, they don't have access and control of the median. Particularly in countries where control of the media is one of the things that aren't exercises. And so they have limited ways of influencing the secondary sources that available about them. And with that said source, it is difficult for their view to get documented. Now how does that happen? Well, there are two places. Where and why are attached to this? There are two places where you can see the politics playing out and Wikipedia. And these are also too exciting places to take your class if you're interested in revealing the politics of, of knowledge at work. They are the History tab and the talk page. The History tab is where you can do what New York suggest. Just go back through and see how this page has been edited. I like hazmat page in part because it helps teach students how to edit like this is going to come down, come down. But also if you take them to the history page of the page on Jerusalem, the dolly page. If you take them to pages on political Tompkins. Well, if you go to the Jerusalem page, it is that you can't trust them. You have to be very senior in the Wikipedia editorial volunteer hierarchy. Allowed to edit. The Jerusalem page are few other pages like that where the politics itself is recognized as being the thing that has played out in describing just the city of Jerusalem sign. And then

the other place to take people is the talk page where people are explaining why it is that they are making the claims that they are making about, say, some of my favorites are why this person is notable. In in RSA, the one that I coauthored when I do see us and good depth is the one of two activists who drew me to using but PD at my classroom. She tells the story of putting up a wet during a Wikipedia event, putting up a web page. One of the most important philanthropists Africa. While she put it up, it was taken down as the person was not notable enough. And coincidentally because she was sitting next to a very senior editor on Wikipedia, that person was able to communicate with more authority that yes, indeed, this has some this person isn't the knowable and to recognize resources. So because honestly it was not recognized as a senior enough editor because the person who decided to pick on this African philanthropist has plant-based, wasn't somebody who was attuned to African found this philanthropies even something that needed to be cover. It actually took a personal politics, the old-fashion time to get the legitimacy, that notability of that particular person to be recognized. So I think I have set for the questions of why repressor of sources and the history page and the criteria, notability. Some architecture of Wikipedia that reveals the politics of knowledge to students, gets them in it. I've had students create pages that were taken down because their person was not notable enough. And the student was quiet. Lovely student didn't assume a feminist must therefore not be important, but rather understood the proper less than, than the entire. The thing I like about teaching Wikipedia

through editor, fonts and a class activity is it reclaims the crown that crowdsourcing is kind of a metaphor on, in the articles in Wikipedia because we are not gathered together to edit Wikipedia. But if we added that, keeping it together and edit fonts over the course of this semester as a class. Then the experience that my student Noah had over his feminist and the struggle that he had in claiming Notability for that particular feminist can be a lesson that the others in the classroom as a PDF editors can use in their editing process. And so my pleasure in teaching this as part of a class as opposed to Sure, I'd like to show you how to do this. I'd be happy to coach you in doing this. Yes, I'd love to teach you how to do Wikipedia editor. It is more that I see so much learning happening from each student individually experiencing their own experience of epistemic privilege being challenged, their own epistemic authority being challenged. That helps them become one self-aware about their own, but also aware of others, that we are all facing. The politics of knowledge, whether we are winners or losers in a particular struggle over the Varney particular question, the politics of knowledge. It's very important to recognize that that indeed was one of the things at stake when we were making our argument, publishing argument and whatnot. So I will turn over to my colleague Kristin, who has been thinking a lot about the different ways of utilizing this range of Substantive areas.

Kristin Michelitch: [16:17] Hello, my name is Kristen McCulloch. I'm an assistant professor here at Vanderbilt in political science. And I've actually used Wikipedia entries as a

term project in both African politics and also ethnic politics classes at the undergraduate level. And I've also used this as kind of a mini-project in PhD courses as well. And I'm happy to talk more about that. That's a little different from what I've been doing with the undergraduates. But I really like this assignment. I really want other people to know how fun it is for students. How many PED, pedagogical benefits that they get from the assignment and how easy it really is for instructors to, to implement. So first, I think that as Brooke mentioned, there's not only this pedagogical benefit that students get, but there's also this kind of society wide benefit when students can take part in a public-facing mission to democratize knowledge. So as Brooke really carefully, you know, discussed, We're in a very privileged position that we have access to these gated resources. And most people have to pay \$27 for access to one scholarly article that maybe is not written in a way they can understand. So we're in a very privileged position. But it is part of the university mission to spread and create knowledge for the public in addition to our goals to research and to teach students. So I'll talk first a little bit about the pedagogical skills that I see for undergraduate students from doing these Wikipedia pages. And first of all, I guess I should say that each student in my class is required to do an individual Wikipedia entry, either create a new page or to significantly improve an existing page. So some classes have group work or the whole class will work on a page together. So that's a little bit different. I haven't done that. But in my classes I've had students basically pick their own Wikipedia page that they want to

improve. So what pedagogical skills do they get? The first one, I think, is it sharpens digital literacy skills in an era of fake news. So right now, our students are really, actually, everybody is having to grapple with this issue of what information do I trust? So when they go to create a Wikipedia page, they need to incorporate information to this page. And which kinds of information do we trust what's eligible and how do we balance that? And Wikipedia has rules about that. Some of these rules Brook has mentioned, but they need to grapple with oftentimes when they're doing page about African politics. Say, do I trust the government news source when they report in this way on this coup or this election, right? What about this NGO? What about this scholarly resource that was written 50 years ago that might be exoticizing African populations. So I think that we have to discuss a lot of where source credibility and where information comes from. And the students really can grow through thinking about these issues. The second pedagogical skill, I would say is it greatly enhances students library research skills and their citation skills. So this is, of course, a major thing that we teach at the university is how to use the library. How to use it effectively, how to find things, but also how to cite them. And to really make a contribution to Wikipedia, you have to cite every single sentence. So some students think of, oh, I'll just write all this stuff and then throw in a site no, and Wikipedia you have to cite every single sense, even if it's repetitive. Citation. But they also have to learn a little bit about how to integrate sources. So they're not just citing the same thing over and over to create a paragraph. The third

pedagogical skill I would say is it demystifies technical web editing skills. So it's not super hard to edit Wikipedia technically, but for some students, depending on their background, they might be very shy. Oh jeez, could I do that? I mean, it appears on the Internet. It's sort of, you know, could appear as something like boy, I could never do that. Or that's for somebody who's taken ten computer science classes or sits up all night, you know, coding for fun or something like that. But at learning to edit Wikipedia is kind of like a very soft entry into learning how to do some technical web editing. The fourth, the fourth pedagogical skill I would say is learning to write neutrally. So actually in the feedback that I get from students at the end of the semester about the assignment. One of the things that many highlight is, well, I've never had an assignment where I've had to write neutrally most of the time, I'm asked to argue a point and maybe offer some counterpoints. But I have to have a strong thesis and I have to argue something. And of course, that type of writing is useful for students. They should do it. But I was actually a little surprised that many people said, Well, I've never had to do an assignment that was different. So we should clearly be offering different types of writing Assignments and skills for students. We shouldn't have all one or all the other. But I thought that the Wikipedia assignment seemed to really benefit students according to students in their own words. Wow, you know, like writing neutrally is hard. I can't insert myself. I can't put in little adjective saying I liked this, this great activist or fantastic leader or something like that. So they have to really scale back a lot of their peer

review and other kinds of reviews that we do with them throughout the semester on their writing has to do with getting them into a neutral point of view that's required by Wikipedia. Okay, So I think the fifth pedagogical skill is students gain confidence as producers of knowledge. And of course, now that's a hot topic grade. It's students shouldn't just be consumers of knowledge, they should be producers of knowledge. And so they know about this and they like this. And of course, the teaching centre likes this and professors like this. So this is a really easy way for them to feel budding confidence will I could do something that will go out into the public sphere. It's a public-facing output that'll actually have impact on an authentic audience. So I wouldn't say that those are the five, the five benefits, sharpening digital literacy skills, the research and citation skills. Demystifying technical web editing, writing neutrally, and becoming competent as producers. I also want to emphasize though, that students love this assignment. They share it with their parents, they share it with members of their community. When I did ethnic politics for the first time, there was a lot of people who are persons of color were from distinct community, like minority communities. And oftentimes they would take up interesting individuals or aspects of ethnic politics from their community. And they would become very proud. I had one student who was half Japanese halfway it. And he contributed a page on a Japanese American activist during World War Two. And there is no page for this activist and it was a major activist. And he created this page and then shared it with his family and with community

members. And some people hadn't heard of this person and they're like, why haven't we heard about it? And you did this and isn't it wonderful? So I think that they, this is a real output that students can get behind because they pick it themselves, at least in my class. And they, they oftentimes might pick something they're very personally interested in. So I think that it gives them also an opportunity. If one allows them to pick their own page to explore something they're interested in. And that's also something that they say that they love in the feedback on this assignment. A lot of times people give a canned assignment where students are having to write about the same topic. And of course it's a lot of work if it's more work for the instructor, if it's not a canned assignment. But I find that allowing them to pick their own page, they just do such a great job out of intrinsic motivations. Because they, they can pick something they're passionate about. And they also get behind the normative goals of democratizing knowledge. So through discussion of a lot of the things that Brooke was talking about early on in the class. Why are we doing this? Why are we interested in making pages for Wikipedia? They feel a personal responsibility for doing a good job on their page. So it actually with the very high caliber students that we have here at Vanderbilt, it's easy to get extremely high-quality outputs with very little hard grading or anything like that. In fact, the grading that I do is I just require them to include a certain number of academic citations. And that's the only threshold for grading this assignment. The rest just takes care of itself because they want to do a good job. It's going to be out there

in the public space. So for the remainder of what I have to talk about, I was going to talk a little bit about the wiki Edu Platform. If I could have the computer. Then I'm happy to show people how easy it is to implement this assignment for instructors and for our, our listening audience. I would say that what you could do is go to Wiki edu.org and just click around and you'll be able to see quite a lot about this really unique non-profit organization that basically facilitates instructors in higher ed to do these projects. So when I was initially interested in doing a Wikipedia pages as an assignment In my class, I was a little bit like, Oh Jesus is going to require a big fixed cost up front, I'm going to have to learn how to do Wikipedia editing. I had actually never done it before. And so I thought I was going to have a real big fixed upfront costs to learn how to do this myself and then create materials for students and walk them through it, et cetera. But actually, I came across wiki Edu, which does all the work for you. So I'm just going to show a little bit, this is my dashboard. This is courses that I've taught in the past. So I'm just going to pick one of them, an African politics class from fall of 2018. So this is what the wiki do you dashboard home page looks like. So you can see a few kind of neat stats about this class. So there were seven articles created and 33 articles edited. So some students improved upon existing pages, some created new. A total of 25 student editors were in this class. And they added 46.4 thousand words, 684 references. And their articles have been viewed over 3.2 million times. So I think for people in academia where again, we're used to these gated resources and you publish into a

journal and it gets read by other academics. This is a huge audience, so this is something I really harp on. For students. A lot of people are going to read what you wrote. So, this is going to have a real impact. And it'll just grow from there, right? Because as time goes on, more and more people will be reading this articles. So, I'll just show you a little bit about what you can do. So, the timeline that they provide here is really helpful. So what? You can customize all of this. So, they start you off with kind of a standard timeline and then you can tweak, you know, when you want certain things to happen and you give wiki Edu really basic information about the class. Like what days does it meet on? How often does it mean? What's the date ranges for the semester? And then a kind of populates, maybe like a standard timeline of activities to help students learn about the rules for editing Wikipedia. And how to technically edit Wikipedia. And to prudent to slowly be producing their own content. So, you can see that in the very first week, and I don't start them off immediately in the semester, but usually a couple of weeks into the semester. With this assignment. The first thing that they do is they start on these tutorials. On Wikipedia policy is, and this is more about this sandbox talk page watch list is more about technical editing. And so, Wiki to you provides these templates where you know that they just click through. Some of them are like 15 minutes, some are 20 minutes, some are 25 minutes. They click through and they learn from Wiki to you how to do these things. And then they have in-class suggested assignments, so, and exercises that you can do in-class. Discussion, prompt questions. So

here we see a Discussion List. And then slowly, they're basically given a task of identifying their own gap in Wikipedia. So something that's missing. And then they're guided to look for library resources. Usually I have a library session for students with the political science subject librarian so that they can. Easily learn how to find the topics that they're looking for. And then they also have to decide what they're passionate about. So actually, I would say the biggest challenge for instructors is helping them settle on a topic because the topic has to meet these three goals. It's missing on Wikipedia, there are sufficient resources that they can get through the library and that they're passionate about this topic. And again, students, some of them can be paralyzed by this. Because if they're used to doing assignments, the instructor tells them to do. And all of a sudden, what am I interested in? And so, I think this is actually very useful for undergraduate students to have to sit down and think, what am I interested in? Because they can get caught up with making good grades and doing ten majors and doing 15 minors and being club presidents. But what are you interested in? What do you want to contribute broadly to the world? So, I think that, that slowly they're learning about Wikipedia, they're learning the technical editing. But then slowly Also there's these built-in milestones where they are finalizing their topics, they're finding sources, they start drafting their contributions. Usually, I like to do a peer review so that students are giving feedback to each other. That's something that also wiki Edu suggests that you do. And you respond to your peer review. And then eventually by the end of the

class, you're done. And usually I have a class, in-class presentations. So, students actually really love these days to just see what did my classmates work bond. And so usually that might take actually two weeks of, towards the end of the semester. And usually by that time they've done such a good job on their page that they're done. So technically the pages do, you know during the time of final exams. But I would say 90 percent of students are done and have a work by the end of the semester, by the end of the class period, by the time they actually present to their, their fellow students. And I also have them do a reflective essay at the end. And that's also suggested by wiki Edu. But I think that this really kind of solidifies and ties together. What did I learn? That there's a few prompts and kind of what did I learn? What was the key skill that I, the most important and, and so forth. So that's just a little, you know, kind of show of the, of the timeline. Again, you can customize and move any of this around. You can add other activities that they have that are more voluntary. You can really tailor this to a lot of different classes. I think this could work for pretty much any discipline in some way. But I think it especially works well in social sciences or maybe humanities because there is just so much missing out there. I think that other areas are a little bit more comprehensive. But I think it's really helpful for social sciences to do this in the classroom. And one kind of cool thing too is students could also do this project for multiple classes. So, I had some people take my African politics class and my ethnic politics class. And actually, they loved it because they already knew all the rules for editing

Wikipedia, which is fine. But they got to explore yet another topic that they were interested in. So, this is an assignment where they can't cheat. They can't get somebody else's work from one year ago. It could be infinitely repeated across many different classes. You know, not everybody can be doing this across a university, but certainly it could be repeated within disciplines or, or across disciplines. So, I would say that for me personally, it's been one of the most rewarding assignments that I've ever given. And the students get so much out of it and they just love it. But then at the same time, I think it's very easy for instructors if you can partner with weak Edu. Now the wave to partner with weak ETU as they kind of do a call, an open call a few months before each semester. And so, you have to do like a little kind of application saying, Oh, here's the topic, my class. Here's what I'd like to do. I've always gotten approved. I don't know someone who hasn't. Gotten approved. But as this gets more popular, maybe there would be constraints because they do assign a person it wiki Edu to your class. And actually, they're available for students to e-mail or you can e-mail them if you have questions or concerns as the process goes on. So presumably there might be some limits to how many instructors they're willing to take. But I do have the feeling that if you've already done it before, they know you're, you know, not going to be asking too many questions. So I kind of got the feeling that like if I do different things that they would improve, approve me since I'm already kind of in the system. And that's all I have for you today on the nuts and bolts. But I'm happy to answer any questions about how things

went in these classes or how the wiki EDU partnership worked out.

Derek: [38:27] That was Brooke Ackerly, Professor of Political Science and Kristen Michelitch, Assistant Professor of Political Science speaking that a digital commons event here at Vanderbilt University. Thanks to both of them for sharing their experiences here on the podcast and for their work on the forthcoming special issue of PS, Political science and politics devoted to teaching with Wikipedia. That issue isn't out yet, so I can't include a link to it in the show notes, but we have included links to more information about broken Kristen and their work. You'll also find a link to that 2007 interview with Michael best. I mentioned at the top of the episode, and a link to the Wiki Education website, which has so many resources for teaching with Wikipedia. I thought I might say a bit more about the Digital Commons, which hosted this presentation by Brooke Kristen. The Digital Commons is a new faculty development initiative at Vanderbilt, housed in the Vanderbilt libraries. It's mission is to equip faculty with the skills they need to use digital technologies in their research and their teaching. Back in April of 2021, I was named interim director of the Digital Commons. Taking some of what I know about faculty development around technology from my center for teaching experience and applying that to faculty research, scholarship, and professional productivity. I've really enjoyed reaching out to faculty and staff colleagues like broken Kristen across campus to develop a robust set of workshops and panels for this fall, the first semester of the Digital Commons operation. And I'm looking forward to building

out the Digital Commons staff and developing even more resources and services for faculty in 2022. And to be clear, I'm still the Executive Director of the Center for Teaching. I like to keep busy. Leading lines is produced by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching and the gene and Alexander heard libraries. You can find us on Twitter at leading lines pod and on the web at leading lines Pod.com. This episode was produced by Seth shepherd and Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the first, third Monday of each month. And your host. Thanks for listening.